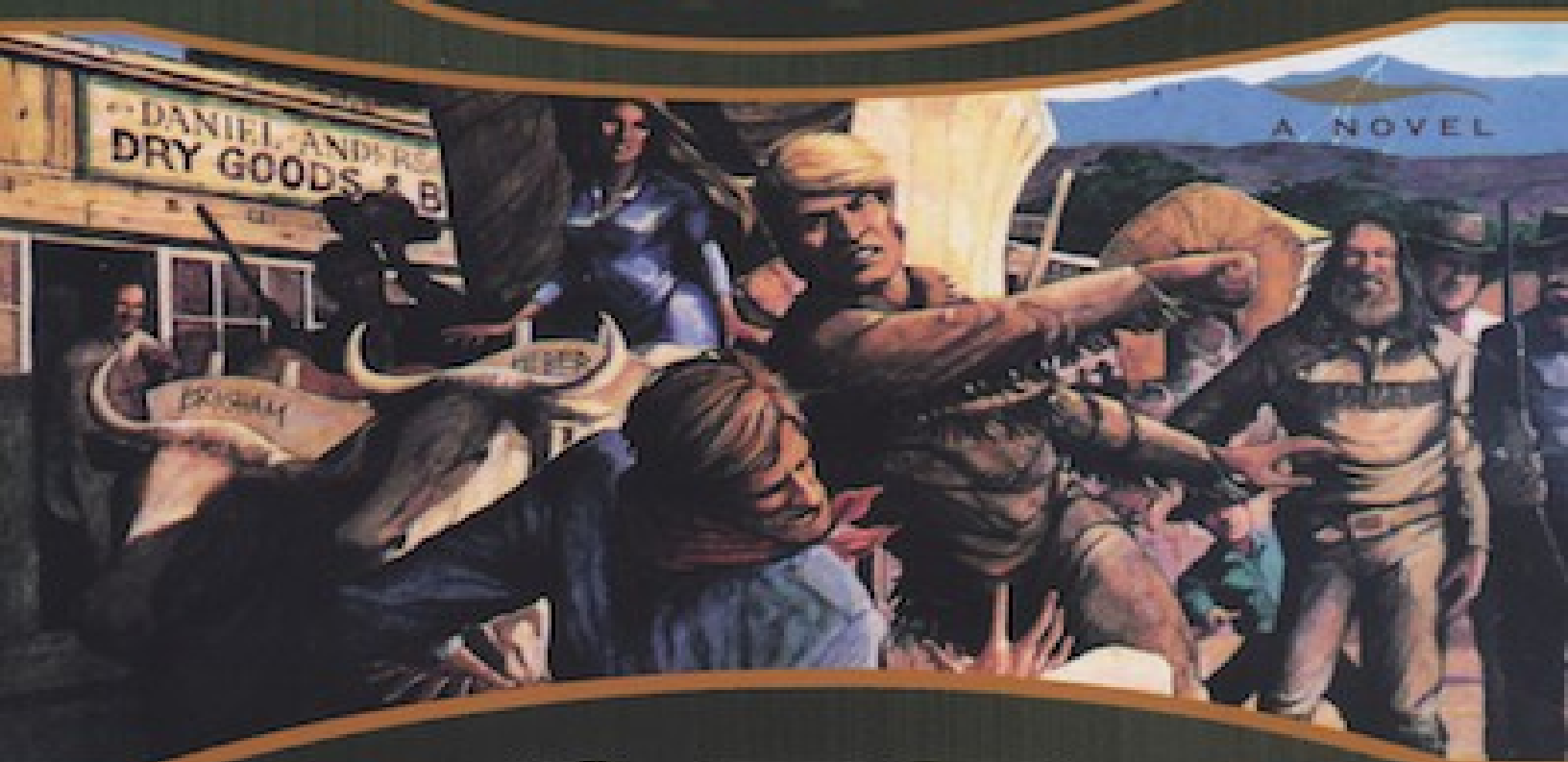


THE STORM TESTAMENT

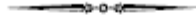
VOLUME FOUR



A NOVEL

LEE NELSON

Storm Testament IV



Lee Nelson

Council Press
Springville, Utah

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ISBN 13: 978-1-55517-413-2

Published by Council Press, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc., 2373 W. 700 S.,
Springville, UT, 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc. www.cedarfort.com

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Nelson, Lee.

[Storm testament]

The Storm testament I /by Lee Nelson.

p. cm.

Originally published: Storm testament, 2001.
ISBN 978-1-55517-413-2 (alk. paper)
1. Rocky Mountains—Fiction. 2. Ute Indians—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3564.e4675S76 2007
813'.54—dc22

2007026687

Cover design by Jeremy Beal
Cover design © 2008 by Lyle Mortimer
Edited by Melissa Caldwell

Printed in the United States of America

1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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Author's Note

About the Author

Chapter 1

I knew something was wrong the instant I saw Porter Rockwell. It wasn't that his face gave anything away. On the contrary, he had a face of stone, occasionally smiling to indulge friends, but otherwise a face that never gave away the thoughts and feelings of the man behind it. Port could stand face to face with the Devil himself, look the old man in the eye without blinking, and call him an egg-sucking hog.

That was Port, all right, the man who had gunned down the leader of the Carthage mob that had killed the Prophet Joseph. Though it had never been proven in court, Port was the man who had shot Lilburn Boggs, the notorious governor of Missouri who in 1838 ordered that all Mormons who refused to surrender their arms, sign over their property, and leave the state would be exterminated. There's no telling how many men had fallen before Port's smoking guns in his efforts to help Brigham Young turn the Utah wilderness into a thriving, civilized community. Had Port cut notches in his gun handles, like other lawmen and gunfighters often did, there's no doubt but what the stocks on his guns would have been notched entirely away.

There was nothing in Port's personal appearance, either, that caused the hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach. He wore the usual buckskin shirt, greasy and torn from years on the trail. His long hair was tied in a bundle under his sweat-stained hat. He sat straight in the saddle, though it appeared he had been on the trail for many days.

I knew something was wrong from the condition of his horse. I had seen the stylish bay stallion before, in Salt Lake City. Port loved fine horses, and this bay was one of the finest west of the Mississippi, also one of the fastest horses in the territory. But as it trotted toward me across the rocky flat beside Silver

Lake at the head of Big Cottonwood Canyon, it appeared to be favoring at least two, if not three, feet. As it got closer I could tell from the sound of the hooves on the rocks that two shoes were gone, allowing those hooves to be worn to the quick on the rocky trail. The animal was wet with sweat, and the dirt stains streaking down from the saddle blanket and around the bridle told me it had been sweating a long time. The bay's ears were not forward anticipating the trail ahead or back to pick up signals from its rider, but drooping sideways in total exhaustion. Not caring what was ahead or behind, its only concern seemed to be to keep going. And it didn't appear that it could go much farther.

I knew cruel men—even mean boys—who would abuse a horse like that for no reason. But not Porter Rockwell. For him to wear a horse down like that, he would have to have a good reason. And that's what worried me.

I nodded at Port as he rode by, followed by three other riders on fresher horses. The riders had apparently joined him somewhere down the trail; it was obvious that neither they nor their horses had traveled as far as Port and his horse had.

“Dan Storm, good to see you,” he said without slowing the big bay. He continued on toward Brigham Young's tent, where he dismounted and quickly disappeared inside without bothering to tie up his horse. But that wasn't necessary. The bay was too exhausted to even graze on the rich mountain grass. It just stood where he had dropped the reins, its head down, its rear foot cocked, too weary to even swat at flies with its tail.

Chapter 2

Brigham Young didn't make the announcement right away. Maybe he didn't want to spoil the festivities for the nearly twenty-five hundred people who had made the trek to the head of Big Cottonwood Canyon. Maybe he just wanted to fully analyze the situation before he made any public announcements.

Either way, it was evening, just before the final night of dancing, that Daniel H. Wells, acting under Brother Brigham's direction, called the people together.

He began his remarks by announcing that the United States government mail contract with the newly established pony express had just been canceled. No further mail would be coming from the East. But that wasn't the worst of the news. Port and his friends hadn't nearly killed their horses to bring word of a canceled mail contract.

The President of the United States had dispatched twenty-five hundred troops to invade Utah and put an end to what many Easterners referred to as the Utah rebellion. An army supply train consisting of seven hundred wagons full of supplies and a walking larder of over five thousand head of cattle were already on the plains heading for Utah.

The formerly jovial crowd suddenly became silent. No one seemed quite sure how to react to such shocking news.

I looked toward the American flag flapping briskly in the cool evening breeze at the top of a newly peeled pine pole. At the beginning of the two-day celebration there had been an elaborate flag-raising ceremony, complete with patriotic speeches and a brass band playing the national anthem. Now the

same government that we had pledged allegiance to was sending troops to put the Mormons in their place.

I'm sure some in the stunned crowd were thinking back to the persecutions in Missouri and Illinois when the government sat idly by while angry mobs had attacked the Mormons, driven them from their homes, and taken away their property. Now that same government was invading their promised land for no legitimate reason that anyone in Utah could understand.

Everyone knew the recently departed federal judge, William Drummond, had had nothing good to report about the Mormons. The judge had created a scandal in Utah, having left his wife behind in coming to Utah, and often having his mistress sit with him on the bench. Mormons had taken their disputes to the bishops' courts, leaving the federal court nearly empty and the non-Mormon judge without influence or status in Salt Lake City. The judge was on record as telling two reporters that "money was his God." The man was without respect among the Mormons and left the territory in disgrace. But no one suspected his tales of rebellion and disobedience among the Mormons would have such an effect on the President of the United States.

Knowing the judge wouldn't have anything good to report about the Mormons when he returned to Washington, some enterprising Mormons had taken a good portion of the judge's court records, intending to pass them on to the next judge at a later date, figuring the less ammunition the judge had on his return to Washington, the better. The trick backfired, however; the angered judge reported how the Mormons were stealing and destroying federal court records.

As I found out later, Congress was not in session when President John Buchanan and Secretary of War John Floyd ordered a regular army force mobilized at Fort Leavenworth to march on Utah Territory. The mission was to unseat Brigham Young and put Alfred Cumming in his place as territorial governor. Cumming was formerly an Indian agent on the upper Missouri.

Daniel H. Wells's remarks were brief. When finished, he turned and reentered President Young's tent, leaving the silent crowd to speculate on future developments. Gradually the shock wore off and people began to talk more freely. The band began to play in preparation for the dance.

I returned to my tent and wagon, where Caroline and Sarah were preparing the children for bed.

As I approached I could see Caroline's silhouette against the last rays of the setting sun, which turned her loose blonde hair into a spray of gold as she tossed her head to one side, her arms reaching high to hang articles of wet clothing over a new hemp rope stretched tightly between the wagon seat and an aspen tree.

She was wearing a loose white blouse that only showed her womanly figure more when she raised her arms high into the air. Below the blouse was a gray skirt that extended nearly to the ground.

Caroline looked amazingly good for a woman who had spent nearly ten years on the frontier, bearing three children during that time. She didn't wear a bonnet or hat all the time like the other women, allowing a tanned healthy look to her skin. The hard work of the pioneer life had kept her figure trim and youthful—had not burned her out and worn her down as it had so many pioneer women.

Caroline was unaware of my approach as I walked up behind her, seizing her firmly around the waist. She spun in my arms, slinging a wet pair of trousers behind my neck, pulling my face down to hers.

"I'm so glad we came up here," she said when she finished kissing me. "We need to get away like this more often." I nodded my agreement, reluctant to share the recent news from the East, not wanting to spoil the holiday.

After throwing the wet trousers over the line, I took her by the hand and led her into the tent, where Sarah was bent over our seven children, all in a row between two big blankets. The two oldest, Pat and Sam, were on the outsides to keep the smaller children from rolling out. None of them looked very sleepy. Sarah had been trying to quiet them with a story.

Sarah wasn't as strong as Caroline. The frontier life had been harder on her. She had been ill more often and had tired more easily. But she seldom complained. She couldn't work as hard as Caroline, but her patience with the children seemed endless. Over the years, while Caroline had assumed more of the work responsibilities, including working side by side with me in the fields, Sarah had assumed increasing responsibilities in tending and caring for the seven children of both women.

I dropped to my knees and fell forward across the children, some of them beginning to squeal in delight as I gave them their goodnight hugs and kisses while their mothers began getting ready for the dance.

“Don't get them all wound up,” scolded Sarah. “And don't let them get out of bed.”

“Pat says that man in the buckskins is Porter Rockwell,” said Sam, now eight. “But I know he isn't.”

“How's that?” I asked.

“Porter Rockwell has long hair. Joseph Smith promised him he would be strong like Samson if he never cut his hair. The man in buckskins didn't have long hair.”

“Wasn't the man wearing a hat?” I asked. He nodded. “What do you think was under the hat?”

I explained how Port frequently braided his hair like an Indian and coiled the braid on top of his head under his hat.

“I tol' you so,” said Pat condescendingly.

Sam sat up. “I got to see him.”

I pushed him back down. “You'll have plenty of time for that tomorrow. He's spending the night.”

“Has he really killed over a hundred men?” asked Pat.

“I don't know,” I said. “Good night.” I stood up in spite of the protesting children and motioned for Caroline and Sarah to follow me outside. It was time to give them the news, before they heard it from someone else at the dance.

“But what does it mean?” demanded Caroline after I had related the details of the recent announcement.

“What will happen?” asked Sarah.

“I don't know,” I said. “We may have to defend our land against federal troops. Perhaps we'll have to flee. Maybe the whole thing will just blow over. I don't know. I suppose many things could happen. We'll just have to wait and see. We'll head home tomorrow as planned and see how things go from there.”

“Has the dance been canceled?” asked Sarah.

“No,” I said. “Hurry and get ready.”

Sarah turned toward the tent, but Caroline remained where she was. “We have company,” she said, looking past me. I turned to see who was coming. It was Porter Rockwell. We didn't know each other well. I had been in his posse on several occasions. He knew I had lived with the Utes before the pioneers came to the valleys, and he was aware of my skills in the mountains.

“Can I see you alone?” he asked while still walking toward me. Port was not a man of many words. He always got directly to the point.

Caroline joined Sarah in the tent, where I could already see the faces of little boys peeking under the canvas.

Port and I shook hands. “Good to see you, Port,” I said. He nodded. “Some of the boys and me are heading east in a few days,” he began, looking me directly in the eye. “Going to check out that supply train, find out what we can on what the soldier boys is up to.”

He looked down at his cowhide boots as he kicked at a clump of bear grass. “Brother Brigham's still not sure what to make of the situation. But one thing's for sure. Can't let them get in the valley this year. Me and the boys may do some things to slow 'em down.”

Port looked up again, directly into my face. “Want you to come with us.”

I hesitated, thinking for an instant of all the farm work back home that required my attention. The potatoes and corn that needed to be tended to. The second crop of hay. The livestock. A new fencing project I was determined to finish before winter. My boys were still too young to be very much help. But even more important, with an army about to invade the land, I was reluctant to leave my families alone.

“Can I tell you in the morning?” I asked.

“Any problem?”

“No. Just want to discuss it with the women.”

“Let me know in the morning,” said Port as he turned and walked away.

Chapter 3

After buying the last of the supplies for our journey eastward, Port and I walked out on the porch of the State Street dry goods store. We were heading out the next morning. Caroline, Sarah, and the children had prearranged to pick me up in front of the store.

As I looked up the street to see if they were coming, I saw, instead of one wagon, an entire train of wagons coming in my direction. Word was out that two gentile trains were in town, one from Arkansas led by a man named Charles Fancher, the other from Missouri, the men in this group calling themselves the Missouri Wildcats. Both groups were headed for California and had apparently joined forces in Salt Lake for their mutual protection.

“Brigham Young, may your stubborn heart burn in hell forever and ever,” shouted a tall, thin man walking through the gray dust next to the lead ox team.

The man had a sparse red beard that offered his sunburned face little protection from the summer sun. His felt hat was dirty and stained with sweat around the band. His blue cotton shirt was also dark with sweat under the arms and in the center of the man's thin chest. His mouse-colored trousers were wrinkled below the knees and grease-stained on the thighs and hips. The man wore a long-barreled horse pistol on his left hip, backwards, so he could draw it with his right hand.

“Git moving, Brigham,” he shouted, loud enough for everyone along the street to hear, “or I'll kick you in the belly. If you hadn't been castrated, I'd kick you where it would really hurt.”

The big brown and white ox wiggled its ears and flicked its tail but did not hurry up its plodding pace.

“Damn you, Brigham. For two cents I'd skin you alive and feed you to the Mormons,” shouted the man, louder than ever. Then referring to the other ox, he said, “Heber Kimball here may be dumb enough to try to pull the whole load by himself, but he can't do it.”

A small crowd was beginning to gather to watch the man abuse Brigham and Heber. Mormons were accustomed to this form of heckling from California-bound settlers and normally tried to ignore such taunting. Non-Mormon settlers naming their oxen after Mormon leaders was nothing new. But this man was more creative, more colorful than most, and certainly more vocal.

Noticing the gathering crowd, the man took a step back, hands on hips. He wasn't about to let an opportunity pass to perform for an audience. He turned to the crowd.

“Brigham Young here is too lazy to put in an honest day's work,” he shouted. There was no response from the crowd, all of whom were now aware that Port and I were standing on the porch. Some were looking toward Port to see how Brigham Young's personal bodyguard would respond to the taunting. Port did nothing.

“And oh, how Brigham smells,” continued the man, gaining confidence. Not only did the gathering Mormons appear weak and cowardly to him, but he had nearly sixty armed companions to back him up in case of trouble.

“He stinks as bad ...” He paused, searching for the right comparison. “He stinks as bad as Heber here. Smelliest buggers I ever saw.”

“You don't like Mormons?” ventured one of the spectators.

The man in the street began to laugh, then said, “No, no. I love Mormons.” He paused, then continued. “I love the feel of a Mormon beneath my boot. I love to see a Mormon in my rifle sights. I love Mormon women ...”

“Seth Stevenson, shut your dirty mouth!” shouted a female voice. I hadn't noticed the woman before. She was sitting on the seat of the man's wagon. She had long brown hair and was wearing a clean blue dress. Even in her anger she was uncommonly handsome as she looked straight ahead, shouting at the man in the street.

The man spun around in surprise. He hadn't anticipated an attack from his own group. He pointed at her, his hand shaking.

“Woman!” he screamed. “You be silent.”

All was quiet for a moment, with everyone, including the man in the street, waiting to see how the woman would respond to the challenge. She continued to look straight ahead, her jaw firm. It seemed she was about to say something, and finally she did. Her voice was calm, but firm.

“If you want silence out of me, Seth Stevenson, you'll have to be more careful about what you say, at least in public.”

The man didn't finish his comment about Mormon women. But he continued his tirade against Mormons in general.

“See this here gun?” he said, turning back to the crowd and placing his left palm on the butt of the revolver in the holster. “Worth a lot of money. Know why?” He paused, allowing the crowd to think about his question. “It's one of the guns that killed old Joe Smith. Mighty proud of this ol' piece. Yes sir. Bought it from a man in Carthage for fifty dollars. Said a slug from this ol' piece tore right through old Joe's ...”

“That's enough, Mr. Stevenson,” said a voice from the crowd, a quiet voice, but everyone heard it. It was the voice of Porter Rockwell.

Chapter 4

I was more than a little surprised when Port motioned for me to accompany him into the street. He certainly didn't need my help putting the smart-mouthed Missourian in his place. Nevertheless, I complied with his request, walking at Port's side as we approached Seth Stevenson.

"No barbers in Salt Lake, squaw man?" asked Stevenson, noticing Port's long hair and buckskin shirt. Port was not wearing a hat and his hair was hanging loose about his shoulders.

Port didn't respond. Stevenson swelled with confidence.

"You don't like me naming my oxen Brigham and Heber?"

Port surprised me by looking down at the ground. His arms were folded across his chest, his hands a long way from his guns. He kicked at the dust with his boot. "Say anything you want about the Mormons," said Port, surprising everyone, including me and the tall stranger. "It don't bother me."

Port continued to look at the ground. Stevenson was grinning over his apparent victory.

"But my friend here, he's plenty upset," muttered Port.

"Wait a minute," I began, looking over at Port, who ignored me.

"Said to me over there that he'd like to black both of your lying eyes," continued Port. "But he's too bashful to ask you to fight him."

"That so?" said the Missourian, looking at me for the first time.

I was just about to try to explain that Port was the one who wanted to fight when Port cut me off.

"He don't want to embarrass ya in front of all these people. He thinks all you hogbrains got outhouse slush in yer veins and yeller streaks down yer

backs. No guts to toss yer gun in the wagon box and fight a real man like Storm here.”

Before I could say anything, Stevenson had drawn his pistol and tossed it into the wagon box in front of the woman in the blue dress. In almost the same motion he was throwing one of his bony fists toward my face.

As I thrust my arm forward to parry his blow, I swore to myself that someday Porter Rockwell would pay for his trickery. He was a man accustomed to fighting and violence, and perhaps thought his little trick very funny. I did not. It had been many years since I had fought a man, and as I grabbed the Missourian's fist, a sick feeling welled up in my stomach. But as I noticed Port's laughter, I became angry.

Though I was not used to fighting, I was not in poor physical condition. A man does not get soft clearing land, building fences, digging ditches, and wrestling cattle and horses. I was strong and soon had the tall, thin Stevenson wrestled to the ground. But before I could rub his sweaty face in the gray dust, he wiggled out of my grasp, kicking me in the side of the face as he scrambled to his feet.

Hoping not to give him a chance to catch his breath, I lunged forward, head down, hoping to get a hold on him again. I had no intention of boxing him at arms' length, not when his arms were probably six inches longer than mine.

But this time he avoided my efforts to grab him by dodging to one side, delivering two vicious blows to my face. Holding both of my hands over my face, as though I were hurt bad, I watched him through my fingers, waiting for him to come again.

I didn't have to wait long. Still holding my hands over my face, I waited until just the right moment to grab an arm and begin twisting while I kicked his feet out from under him. He hit the ground hard this time, and I could feel what seemed to be the cracking of a rib as my knee thrust into his chest. He wiggled free again, but not before I delivered several solid blows with my fists and elbows.

As he scrambled to his feet, holding his ribs, I was expecting him to come at me again. I was totally surprised when he turned and lunged toward the safety of his wagon. I hadn't expected the fight to end so quickly. I had thought this loud-mouthed Missourian had more fight in him.

But that sick feeling suddenly returned as I realized he was not running from me, but going after his gun, the one he had thrown in the wagon box. I charged after him, figuring my only chance was to beat him to the gun.

Stevenson was stepping from the wheel into the box when I reached the wagon. Using the big wagon wheel as a ladder, I leaped after him, grabbing him from behind before he could get to the pistol. Over we went into the back of the wagon, taking the surprised woman with us. Over the sound of bodies crashing against boxes and boards I could still hear Port's laughter.

The lanky Missourian was no match for me in the close confines of a cluttered wagon box. I was soon on top, punching him repeatedly in the face when suddenly, without warning, someone grabbed me around the neck from behind. At first I thought friends of the Missourian from other wagons had decided to join the fight, but when fingernails began digging into my flesh I realized it was not another man, but the woman in the blue dress who had attacked me.

I reached back with my left arm and tried to brush her away, but she wasn't about to be pushed aside. As I struggled to shake her free, my grip on the man was loosened and he began reaching for the pistol by our feet. Outside I could hear Porter Rockwell's shrill laughter. My life was in danger, and he was laughing.

I became angrier than before, reaching back over my shoulder with one hand while trying to hold the man with the other. Finally, grabbing the woman's hair, I jerked her around to one side and backhanded her solidly across the face.

With the woman finally out of the way, I delivered a solid blow to the man's jaw, feeling his body go limp. The fight was over, except for Port's continued laughter.

I looked over at the woman. Her hands were covering her pretty face as blood oozed from her nose. I felt terrible for what I had done to her. At least she wasn't crying.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Seth?" she said, looking straight ahead. There was alarm in her voice. "Seth, are you all right?"

Something was wrong. The woman was not looking at the man she was calling to.

She was blind. I had hit a blind woman. And it was Porter Rockwell's fault.

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